



# Improving College Choice

Helping students and parents make better informed decisions.

**DATA FOR ACTION**  
2012

## Why This Matters

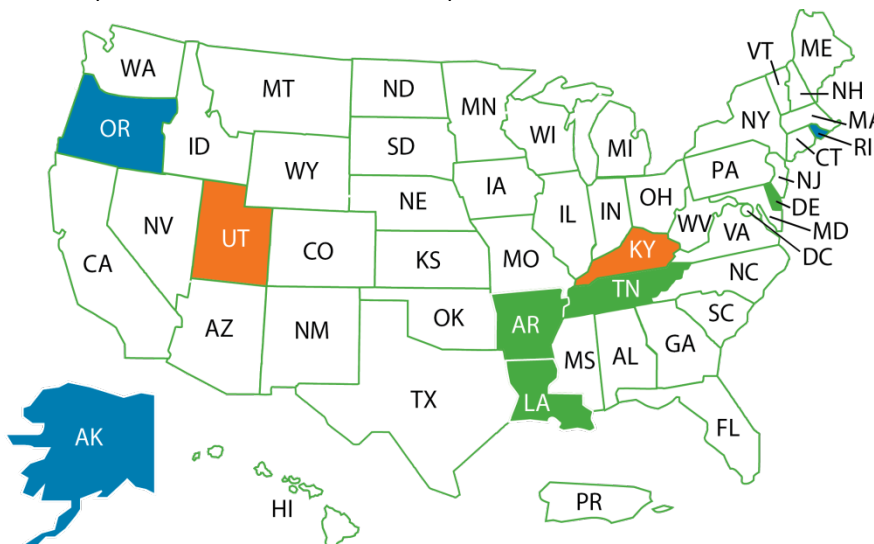
- **As the demand for college<sup>i</sup> graduates increases, it is critical (from both supply and demand perspectives) that students choose the postsecondary option that best meets their needs.**
  - > The demand for better information about postsecondary choices has never been greater.
- **Improved college readiness is an important first step to better informed choices about college.**
  - > Improving students' college readiness will maximize their college options and position them to make better choices. Research indicates that college readiness is influenced by cognitive, learning, and transition skills.
  - > 75 percent of students who fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid only send their information to one college, unnecessarily limiting their options.
- **Parents and students need access to easy-to-understand data to make the best choice possible.**
  - > Research on the choice process indicates that the decisions students make regarding postsecondary education greatly depend on the availability, transparency, and quality of critical academic and financial information.
  - > K–12, postsecondary, and state and federal policymakers have a role to play in ensuring that this information gets into the hands of parents and students.
  - > States have a role to play in helping students make decisions; they are well positioned to provide data that inform the college choice process.

## Just the Facts

### Q: Do states ensure families have access to student-level data that inform the college-choice process?

**A:** **Nearly all states** collect at least some data (academic and financial) that can inform the choice process; however, fewer states ensure that families have access to information:

- College progress and success reports—which include indicators such as student enrollment in college-readiness courses, grades, overall GPA, and college-readiness test scores—are an important tool to help families understand their students' academic readiness for college.
  - > **28 states** provide early warning reports to determine whether students are on track to high school graduation and beyond; of these, **5 states** (AL, AR, FL, OH, OR) provide reports specifically to parents and students.
  - > **5 states** (AR, DE, KY, LA, RI) provide families with information about their children's progress meeting state college enrollment and placement requirements.
- **9 states** provide information that can help families understand how their financial readiness affects the choice process:



- Calculate and share information about students' eligibility for state or federal aid or merit-based aid
- Automatically request transcript information for students applying for state financial aid or merit-based aid
- Complete both actions



### Q: Do states ensure families have access to data about postsecondary institutions that inform the college-choice process?

**A:** In order for students to make the best choice about their postsecondary education, they need information about how students succeed in the institutions they are considering. It is critical that states, federal policymakers, and the postsecondary community collaborate to publicly report comparable, easy-to-find, and easy-to-understand information about institutions.

- **25 states** have produced a high school feedback report that is publicly available, disaggregated by high school, and includes timely, relevant information (i.e., since 2010); however, not all states are making this information available to parents and students.
- **38 states** collect enrollment data for public institutions (less than two-year, two-year, or four-year), while just **7 states** (CO, HI, KY, MD, MN, TN, TX) collect on private (less than two-year, two-year, or four-year) for-profit institutions.
- **38 states** collect remediation data for public institutions (less than two-year, two-year, or four-year), while just **4 states** (CO, HI, MD, MN) collect on private (less than two-year, two-year, or four-year) for-profit institutions.

### LOOKING AHEAD

- It is critical that state and federal policymakers collaborate with the K–12 and postsecondary communities to improve student and parent access to academic and financial data that will better inform the college-choice process.
- As state policymakers work to improve access to important data about the college-choice process, they must consider their role in providing this information to parents and students. States are well positioned to develop links between K–12 and postsecondary data and provide predictive analytic benchmarking.
- Federal policymakers are taking steps to increase transparency for parents and students. The Obama administration has recently released a “[shopping sheet](#)” and launched a [website](#) to provide additional information on colleges. The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) provides an opportunity to continue these efforts.

### States to Watch

- [Colorado](#) and [Minnesota](#) both collect enrollment and remediation data for private for-profit institutions. Both of these states include this information in their high school feedback reports.

### Related and Cited Resources

- William G. Bowen, Matthew M. Chingos & Michael S. McPherson, [Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America's Public Universities](#) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).
- Anthony P. Carnevale, Nicole Smith, and Jeff Strohl, [Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018](#) (Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2010).
- David T. Conley, “[Four Keys to College and Career Readiness](#),” (slide presentation, Council of State Governments, Education Policy Task Force, October 21, 2011).
- Institute for Higher Education Policy, [Maximizing the College Choice Process to Increase Fit & Match for Underserved Students](#) (Author, 2012).
- For more resources visit [www.DataQualityCampaign.org/PolicyIssues](http://www.DataQualityCampaign.org/PolicyIssues) or scan the QR code below.

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this fact sheet, college includes traditional two- and four-year degree granting institutions and alternative types of postsecondary education, such as certificate programs.

